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BALLADS OF HELLAS

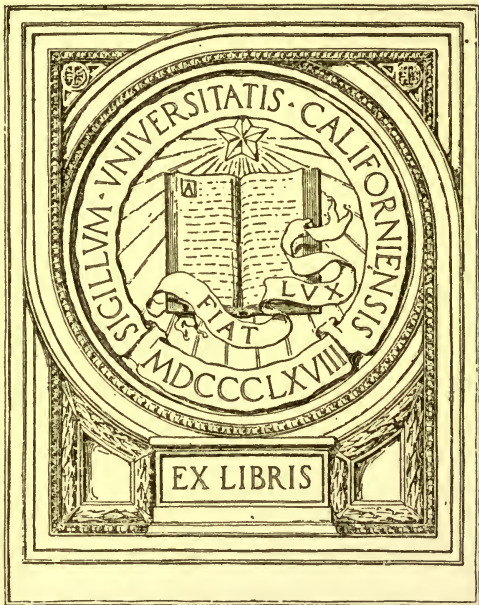


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Ballads of Hellas

BY

WILLIAM HATHORN MILLS A. M.



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Preface

PUBLISHED by George Bell and Sons, London, England, in 1878, these ballads have been out of print for nearly forty years. I now re-publish them in the hope that they may again serve the purpose which they originally served—i. e. that, in running commentaries on the text of the original accounts in Herodotus and Xenophon, they may meet, so far as they go, the difficulty that young learners experience in grasping the subject-matter of their translation-work. The general idea of them was of course suggested by Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, but, so far as the spirit of them is concerned, there is more in them of Scott than of Macaulay. In those far-off days I tested the ballads by actual use, and was quite convinced of the value of the principle on which they were written. So forth they fare again.

W. H. M.

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THE
MUSEUM
OF
THE
CITY OF BOSTON

MARATHON

*Age shakes Athena's tower
but spares gray Marathon.*
BYRON.

MARATHON

I.

WRATHFUL is Persia's monarch,
Wrathful the Persian court,
For post on post is bringing
Tidings of dire import:
How that the sons of Athens,
From Hellas' distant strand,
Have sacked and burned fair Sardes,
Pride of the Lydian land.

II.

"Who are these sons of Athens?"—
In scorn Darius cries;
He takes his bow; the arrow
Flies hurtling to the skies;
"Grant me"—his prayer indignant—
"Great Ormuzd, lord of light,
That I may take full vengeance,
And break proud Athens' might."

III.

Thrice every meal a servant,
 Such is his lord's behest,
 Bids him forget not Athens' name,
 Nor Athens' sin, and fans to flame
 The fire within his breast;
 Daily his Persians urge him—
 "Arm with revenge thy hand;"
 Nor ceases traitorous Hippias, fain
 To rule bright Athens once again,
 Slandering his native land.

IV.

Vanquished in fight at Ladè,
 Ionia's galleys fly;
 And now for many a year resounds
 Thro' Persia, to her farthest bounds,
 The yelping bark of war's fell hounds,
 Athirst for victory;
 Till, the full tale completed,
 A mighty archer-host,
 Twelve myriads strong, by Datis led
 And Artaphernes at their head,
 Start for the Hellene coast.

V.

Eretria soon the Persians
 By treachery foul have ta'en,
 And, by a traitor led, they reach
 Marathon's spreading plain;
 Along the shore the galleys
 Are moored in dense array;
 Athwart the mead, from mount to fen,
 The mighty mass of fighting men
 Await the battle-day.

VI.

Out from the gates of Athens,
 In this their desperate need,

Pheidippides, the swift of foot,
Hurries at headlong speed;
And to the Spartan rulers
This message doth he bear—
“Leave not an ancient Hellene state
To the barbarian spear.”

VII.

“Aye, we will send an army,”
The Spartans straight reply;
But superstition clogs their minds,
Or is it jealousy?
Till the full moon has risen
They linger, to their shame;
Therefore they share nor in the fight,
Nor in the deathless fame.

VIII.

By this the Athenian hoplites
Forth to the war are gone,
And watch the Persian from the heights
That look o’er Marathon.
Ten generals lead the muster
Of scarce nine thousand shields;
Each for one day supreme command
Over the army wields.

IX.

There is a state, to Athens
Linked by full many a tie
Of gratitude, for generous help,
And generous sympathy;
Glad are the bold Plataeans;
Their turn has come at length;
So to the aid they sally forth
In their full fighting strength.

X.

A thousand strong they muster;
A thousand warriors true,

What tho' in number weak, in will
Strong, what they can, they do;
Therefore, whene'er at Athens
They hold a sacrifice,
Twofold the blessings that are asked,
Twofold the prayers that rise;
Mingled with Athens' name, thy name,
Plataea, seeks the skies.

XI.

Awhile divided counsels
The Hellene leaders sway;
Half wish to wait for Sparta's aid,
Half, at the foe no whit dismayed,
Are eager for the fray;
The Polemarch stands doubting
Whether to fight or wait;
Hellas, upon that moment
Hung all thy future fate!
His casting vote for battle
Miltiades has won,
And Hellas owes her freedom
To Kimon's famous son.

XII.

The die is cast, and straightway
Each recreant doubt is gone,
And great Miltiades stands forth
Liberty's champion.
To him as chief commander
The rest allegiance swear,
And with calm courage for the fray,
Deferred, he wills it, till his day
Of office, they prepare.

XIII.

Then, at the time appointed,
The tribes in order stand;
Kallimachos commands the right,

The left—to death or victory dight—*
Plataea's little band;
Thinly along the centre
Muster the Hellene shields,
Fronting the Sakians, and the might
Of Persia—warriors for the fight
Trained by a hundred fields;
On either flank, 'gainst meaner foes,
They mass their strength, to turn and close,
What time the centre yields.

XIV.

And now the Athenian army
Is for the fight arrayed,
And the victims give good omens,
For heaven the right doth aid;
The little host stand silent,
And their hearts beat full and high;
A moment's thought—a moment's pause—
And "forward" is the cry.

XV.

Then first did Hellene soldiers
Run as they charged the foe;
Then first did Hellene soldiers
Lay the barbarians low;
For strange the Median raiment,
Dreaded the Median name,
And from the Median myriads
To fly men thought no shame.

XVI.

Long time they fought; the Persian
Thoro' the centre broke,

* Cp. The golden legend bore aright—
'Who checks at me, to death is dight.'
—Marmion I, VI. 10.

And drove the Hellenes struggling back,
And dealing stroke for stroke;
But Athens' valour triumphs
Victorious on the right,
And on the left the Persian wing
Yields to Plataea's might.

XVII.

Scorning pursuit, the victors
Round on the centre wheel;
Before their onset's sweeping shock
Persian and Sakian reel;
They reel, yet for a moment
Stand, like a wolf, at bay;
They yield—they scatter—and at length
Hellas has won the day.

XVIII.

In terror the barbarians
Make for their ships again;
Hard on them press the Hellene spears,
And blows fall thick as rain;
Now ebbing, and now flowing,
Surges the tide of war;
Persian and Hellene, hand to hand,
Now locked in deadly conflict stand,
Now sink to rise no more.

XIX.

Madly the Persians battle,
Nerved by a blind despair;
Madly they rush to gain their ships;
To flee is all they care.
Ever and aye the Hellenes
Charge with revengeful ire:
Ever and aye with splendid rage
Dash on, the ships to fire.

XX.

Falls the arch-traitor Hippias,
 Right through the body thrust;
 Stesileos, skilled to rule the fight,
 Staggers, and bites the dust;
 And, where the fight is fiercest,
 Battling with might and main
 Against an overwhelming host,
 Kallimachos is slain;
 Slain in his hour of triumph,
 Lies the brave Polemarch;
 Thick round him lie the corpses
 Of Persians, dead and stark.

XXI.

There, too, the warrior poet
 His sword resistless plies;
 There, as he grasps a Persian ship,
 His hand lopped off — unloosed his grip,
 Stout Kynegiros dies;
 And many a gallant Hellene
 Is weltering in his blood,
 And many a doughty soldier
 Of Media's swarthy brood;
 But when the cowed barbarians
 Have gained at length the deep,
 Of Hellenes scarce two hundred
 Sleep on their last long sleep,
 While for six thousand dead and more
 Persia's proud dames shall weep.

XXII.

Round Sounion to Phaleron
 Quick sail the foe and fast,
 But, ere they make the port, they see
 Their conquerors trooping home, and flee,
 And Athens breathes at last.

XXIII.

So Persia's might has yielded
To a little patriot band,
And a loud shout of triumph
Echoes through all the land;
And Sparta's warriors coming
Too late to join the fray,
Half-wondering, half-distrustful, gaze
Upon the field of death, and praise
What Athens wrought that day.

THERMOPYLAE

Τῶν ἐν Θερμοπύλαις θανόντων
εὐκλέης μὲν ἂ τύχα, καλὸς δ' ὁ πότμος,
βωμὸς δ' ὁ τάφος, πρὸ γόων δὲ μνᾶστις,
ὁ δ' οἶκτος ἔπαινος,
ἐντάφιον δὲ τοιοῦτον οὔτ' εὐρὼς
οὔθ' ὁ πανδαμάτωρ ἀμαυρώσει χρόνος.

SIMONIDES

Fair was their fate, and proud their doom,
Who met death at Thermopylae;
As a high altar stands their tomb,
And paeans hymn their memory,
Not threnes. Such shroud nor dank decay,
Nor despot Time, shall wear away.

THERMOPYLAE

I.

GREAT XERXES, lord of Persia,
And many a vassal realm,
Purposed the land of Hellas
In ruin to o'erwhelm;
Leonidas, the Spartan,
His onset fierce withstood,
Who pledged his faith to Freedom,
And sealed it with his blood.

II.

Not of himself had Xerxes
Thought to work Hellas ill,
But evil counsel urged him on
Against his milder will;
Mardonios, hot and headstrong,
Was ever at his side
To spur him on to thoughts of fame,
Nor lacked there of the Hellene name
Traitors, who, void of ruth or shame,
Fostered his empty pride.

III.

These all, at feast and council,
 Gave him nor peace nor rest,
 Till they had roused the lust of power
 Within his puny breast;
 Not e'en might Artabanos
 His lord's ambition bound;
 In the wild clamour of the rest
 His single voice was drowned.

IV.

So forth throughout wide Persia
 Due proclamation went,
 And half a hundred nations round
 Mustered their forces at the sound,
 To swell the armament;
 For four long years re-echoed
 The din of gathering war,
 Till by Kritalla's walls at last
 Met the confederate army, vast
 As never host before.

V.

Came Sakians, Medes, Hyrkanians,
 With Persia's native might;
 Chorasmians, Parthians, Kissians,
 Equipped them for the fight,
 Tiara-crowned, and wearing
 Long sleeves, and brodered trews;
 And eke Sagartia's horsemen grim,
 Of supple frame and sinewy limb,
 Who fling the leathern noose.

VI.

From mountains bleak and rugged,
 Drear steppes, and broad champaigns,
 Came nomad tribes, and savage swarms,
 In motley garb, with motley arms:

Came India's wild and dusky hordes,
Arabia's bows, Assyria's swords:
Came Aethiopia's painted braves,
And warriors armed with wooden staves
From Libya's arid plains;
Phoenicia sent her galleys,
Egypt her naval host;
Ionia manned her ships, and came,
With tribes of every race and name,
Dwelling on Asia's coast.

VII.

Across Mount Athos' isthmus,
Beneath the lash, the while,
Dug toiling gangs a channel deep,
Through which, two ships abreast, might sweep
The fleet in ordered file;
And o'er the strait of Hellè,
Stretching from shore to shore,
Of cables tough a bridge was wrought,
Seven stades in length or more.

VIII.

Wintered the host at Sardes;
Thence, in proud Xerxes' name,
Went heralds forth to Hellas,
Water and earth to claim;
Then first thy billows, Hellè,
Brooked fether, brand, and scourge,
What time the tempest's stormy breath
Had whelmed the cable-bridge beneath
Thy "false and briny" surge.

IX.

His wrath appeased, the monarch
Gave sharp and stern command,
And with a double bridge of boats
Anon the strait was spanned;

Then, with the spring, the army
Bent to the north their way,
And in Abydos' plain at length
Drew out their proud array.

X.

There from a throne of marble
Xerxes his troops surveyed;
Far over plain and winding shore
Glittered their long parade;
Adown the strait his galleys
In mimic battle swept;
One moment, as he gazed around,
His heart exulting leapt;
The next — he bowed him on his throne:
For that of all his host not one,
When once a hundred years had run
Their course, should see the gladsome sun;
Then veiled his face, and wept.

XI.

Thence after due libations
And solemn rites, the host
Over the two long causeways passed
Seven days and nights, in order vast,
On to the Thracian coast;
Then westward to Doriskos,
Keeping the fleet in view,
Like land-wave surging deep and wide,
In all their glittering pomp and pride,
Rolled on the unwieldy crew.

XII.

There was the army numbered;
Riding their ranks along,
Might Xerxes mark with kindling eye
A wondrous multitude, well-nigh
Two hundred myriads strong;

Ranged in a line at anchor,
Four plethra from the shore,
Lay, 'mid a host of smaller craft,
Twelve hundred ships of war.

XIII.

Still westward slow advancing
They pressed toward their goal;
Tribe after tribe came flocking in
To swell the muster-roll;
Till when at length they halted
Beneath Olympos' mount,
How many myriads piled their arms
'Twere hard, I ween, to count.

XIV.

What need to tell of rivers
Drained by that vast array:
Of cities, forced but once to feed
The mighty horde, to direst need
Reduced for many a day?
For far and wide the army
Left havoc in its trail,
And many a ravaged land to heaven
Sent up its dismal wail.

XV.

Through Tempe's pass defiling,
Southward the mighty throng,
Nation by nation, troop by troop,
Dragged its huge length along;
Thessalia yields submission,
Too weak to stand alone;
Yet, had the rest but sent their aid,
Her warrior sons, all undismayed,
Had stoutly held their own.

XVI.

What now of Hellas? Sleeps she
In sullen apathy?

Why comes she not with banded might
To face the foe, and dare the fight
With all her chivalry?
What boots this little handful—
Seven thousand men at arms?
How may their ranks unbroken stand,
When swoops the Persian on the land,
With all his countless swarms?

XVII.

'Tis that at home the Spartans
The feast Karneian hold;
That Hellas counts Olympia's wreaths
Dearer than crowns of gold;
Therefore three hundred Spartans,
With Helots and allies,
Have sworn to stem the foe's advance,
And tell proud Xerxes—chance what chance,
Hellas his power defies.

XVIII.

Where Oeta's craggy grandeur
Frowns beetling o'er the sea,
There lies, 'twixt mountain and morass,
A mile in length, a narrow pass
Yclept Thermopylae;
There to confront the Persian,
And bar his onward way,
The Hellene troop with courage high,
And fixed resolve to do or die,
Halted, and stood at bay.

XIX.

Outside the pass, and over
Against its northern neck,
They piled anew the ruined wall,
The Persian rush to check;
High on the hill above them
Encamped the Phokians sate,

To guard the mountain path which led
Round to the southern gate.

XX.

At length by Trachis' city
Drew up the Persian host;
Their galleys lined the shore, or rode
At anchor off the coast;
Facing the huge armada,
In thin but firm array,
Off Artemision's wave-swept point
The Hellene triremes lay.

XXI.

Then from the Persian army
Rode out a horseman, sent
To scan the Hellenes' camp, and learn
Their number and intent;
Unchecked he watched the Spartans.
Without the pass on guard,
Combing with care their flowing hair,
Or wrestling on the sward.

XXII.

Back to the Persian monarch
He bore his strange report,
Who said—"These Spartans will not fight;"
For aye their games, their solemn rite,
He held but idle sport;
Four days till they should scatter,
Or yield, he stayed the attack,
Then wrathful bade his warriors charge
And bring them prisoners back.

XXIII.

As ocean waves all vainly
Dash on some rock-bound coast,

So vainly on the Hellene ranks
Dashes the Persian host;
Back from the rocks the billows
Recoil in broken spray;
Broken recoils the Persian line
From Sparta's fierce array.

XXIV.

Forth, as in blind disorder
Retires the routed mass,
Step the far-famed Immortals,
And charge to win the pass;
Avails not aught their prowess,
Their valour proved and high;
On the long lances' serried fence
They hurl themselves to die.

XXV.

High on a gilded dais,
Amidst a glittering crowd,
To scan the fight sate Xerxes,
All jubilant and proud;
Full soon his pride was lowered,
As hopes died out in fears;
Thrice from his seat he leapt aghast,
As reeling backward, thick and fast,
Like trees before tornado's blast,
Went down his bravest spears.

XXVI.

Two days they fought, but ever
The Persians fought in vain;
That bristling front they might not pierce,
The pass they might not gain;
Till, heaven's curse on the traitor!
Blinded by lust of gold,
The secret of the mountain-path
False Ephialtes told.

XXVII.

Calm broke the morn, and stilly,
 As up the mountain-side
 Hydarnes' doughty warriors pressed,
 Led by their traitor guide;
 Far, in the morning silence,
 The Phokians heard the sound
 Of trampling feet that crushed the leaves,
 Thick strewing all the ground.

XXVIII.

Ah! Phokis—where thy valour?
 Where now thy vaunted might?
 Why quit thy sons their chosen post?
 Why flee they to the height?
 Reck not of you these foemen—
 They seek a nobler prey;
 Mark how they hold their onward course
 Along the unguarded way;
 That single arrow-flight has changed
 The fortune of the day.

XXIX.

Warned of the coming danger.
 The little host below
 Hold counsel, or to shun the fray,
 Or sell as dearly as they may
 Their lives unto the foe;
 Needs not to tell how sternly
 The Spartan scorns to fly,
 Who, if he may not win the fight,
 Counts it a little thing, and light,
 In duty's cause to die.

XXX.

First, in his right of office,
 Uprose Leonidas;

"Spartans," he cried, "'tis ours to save
Our country, ours to find a grave
Within this narrow pass;
And since or king of Sparta,
(So destiny has willed)
Or Sparta's self must fall, in me
This day the Delphic god shall see
His oracle fulfilled.

XXXI.

"Enough are we for glory;
Enough are we to show
What hearts in Hellene bosoms beat;
What welcome stern and fierce shall greet
The onward marching foe.
Sparta's be all the battle;
Sparta's shall be the fame;
Let our allies while yet they may
Withdraw, in less unequal fray
To drive the Persian in dismay
Back by the way he came"

XXXII.

He spake; the allies assenting
March from the pass full speed,
But the brave Thespians will not quit
The hero in his need;
The Theban troop reluctant
Must stay their faith to prove;
Abides Megistias, blameless seer,
Whose patriot soul nor fate nor fear
Can from its purpose move.

XXXIII.

The foe is up; no longer
His fierce attack they wait,
But sallying out beyond the wall
Charge reckless of their fate.

In forefront of the battle
Towers the Spartan king;
Back from the fury of his spear
The Persians shrink in craven fear,
And distant javelins fling.

XXXIV.

Long raged the mortal conflict,
For Hellas fought amain;
Thrust through, down-trampled, mass on mass,
Lay, strown upon the blood-stained grass,
Or stifled in the deep morass,
By thousands Persia's slain;
Till, their long spears all broken,
Each Hellene drew his brand,
For now the foe came closing up
Round their beleaguered band,
And lashed with scourges to the fight,
'Countered them hand to hand.

XXXV.

Then brooked the Spartan sword-thrust
Full many a Persian wight,
And many a bold barbarian fell
Before the Thespian might;
But aye the storm of battle
Thicker and thicker grow;
And aye the Persians' crescent host
Closer and closer drew.

XXXVI.

Down is the Spartan chieftain—
Shivered that heart of steel;
Fierce o'er his corse his comrades fight:
Four times before their desperate might
Staggering the Persians reel;
Fall prince and princely noble;

Fall Xerxes' brethren twain;
Sparta's and Persia's royal blood
Flows mingling in one streaming flood
Over the reeking plain.

XXXVII.

O'ermatched, outnumbered, ever
The Hellenes held their ground,
Tho' aye their ranks were thinning fast;
Till from the rear rang stern at last
A deep and ominous sound—
The sound of clanging armour:
The measured tramp of feet:
'Twas fierce Hydarnes hurrying up
The slaughter to complete.

XXXVIII.

Then slow the little remnant,
Face to the foe, fell back;
Crossing the wall they sate them down
To bide the last attack;
There, on a grassy hillock,
Hemmed in on every side,
Shot down by javelin, bolt, and dart,
They fought, and fighting died.

XXXIX.

Now, on that little hillock—
Emblem of hearts as brave—
A marble lion stands to mark
The Spartan chieftain's grave;
Hard by twain lettered pillars
The desperate fight record,
And bid the passing stranger tell
Sparta how bravely and how well
Her sons obeyed her word.

XL.

Not vain thy self-devotion,
 High-souled Leonidas;
 Nor vainly with thee fought and fell
 Those heroes of the pass;
 Ye thrilled the heart of Hellas:
 Ye nerved each Hellene hand
 To strike the blow, that swept the foe
 In ruin from the land.

XLI.

Aye; for your bright ensample
 Lit Freedom's sacred flame,
 That broader blazed in after-time,
 And spread thro' every realm and clime
 Your memory and your fame;
 A little time of waiting—
 Then, with fair victory blest,
 Shall Salamis your death requite,
 And proud Plataea's crowning fight
 Give a free Hellas rest.

XLII.

Upon that scene of slaughter
 Turns Hellas reverent gaze,
 And, bending proudly o'er your tomb,
 Gives you not tears but praise;
 Counting that tomb an altar,
 Whereon she laid her best:
 Your name—a watchword and a power
 To fire each patriot breast:
 Your deed—to all her warrior sons
 A mute but proud bequest.

XLIII.

Sleep on; succeeding ages
 Shall keep your memory green;

Devouring time shall have no strength
To dim your glory's sheen;
Lives, and shall live for ever,
Among the brave and free,
The story of the gallant fight,
Fought at Thermopylae.

MANTINEA

*Flebili sponsae iuvenemve raptum
Plorat, et vires animumque moresque
Aureos educit in astra, nigroque
Invidet Ocro.*

HORACE.

MANTINEA

I.

MOURN, land of Muse and hero;
Bow, Thebes, in grief thy head:
Let dirge and funeral anthem
Honour the mighty dead;
Let a nation's tears bear witness,
A nation's heart attest,
That of her warriors, good and brave,
Now lies within his narrow grave
The bravest and the best

II.

And yet what death more noble
Could warrior hope to gain
Than his, whose life-blood dyes the earth
Of Mantinea's plain?
He smote the rebel-leaguers;
He laid the Spartan low,
And victory flung a fadeless wreath
Around his dying brow.

III.

Statesman and soldier peerless,
 True patriot aye and leal,
 Without one thought of self, he sought
 Only his country's weal;
 In the long line of heroes
 Enshrined in history's roll
 Earth boasts no nobler life than his,
 No brighter, purer soul.

IV.

What unto him thou owest
 Let Leuktra's victory tell,
 And twice two hundred Spartan shields
 That grace our citadel;
 Witness each state and city
 Freed from proud Sparta's yoke,
 And pay your homage to his name
 Her despot-power who broke.

V.

The Spartan aye has borne him
 Right bravely in the field;
 Not once nor twice has Athens
 Made Persia's armies yield;
 But, as the stars of heaven
 Faint at the dawning light,
 So at the sun of Thebes' high fame
 Paled Sparta's pride, and Athens' name,
 Dimmed by its lustre bright.

VI.

Yet fate had used him hardly
 Before his crowning fight,
 Or Sparta's self, as nest forlorn,
 Had yielded to his might;
 Had not some adverse daemon
 Stolen their wonted force,

False Mantinea's neck had bent
Before our gallant horse.

VII.

'Tis ever thus; the Immortals,
Who careless dwell on high,
Look down at times on deeds of men
In wrath and jealousy;
Of human pain and anguish
Little they reckon or think;
But, when a mortal man's success
Surmounts, his bark all pitiless
In sight of port they sink.

VIII.

Yet tho' their idle malice
Might will to work him harm,
It might not daunt his soul, nor break
The vigour of his arm;
Unflinching and unbending,
By high resolve upborne,
He rose superior to his fate,
And laughed mischance to scorn.

IX.

'Twas Mantinea's treason,
And Sparta's selfish greed,
That brought us from our northern home
To meet our country's need;
Came with us from Euboea
Full many a staunch ally,
And, ranging with our Theban horse,
Thessalia's cavalry.

X.

Crossing the isthmus, southward
Our slow battalions filed,

Till within Tegea's ancient walls
Halting our arms we piled;
There flocked to join our standard
The Argives, man by man:
The troops of Tegea, leal and true,
Chief of Arkadia's faithful few:
Messenia's warlike clan.

XI.

Meantime the Mantineans,
With panic-terror crushed,
Sent in hot haste for Sparta's aid;
Forth, with battalions all arrayed,
Agesilaos rushed;
Reft of her living rampart,
Sparta defenceless lay;
As falcon to its quarry stoops,
Dashed on the town our fiery troops;
But some ill chance had sent the alarm,
And some ill spell unnerved our arm,
And robbed us of our prey.

XII.

Back to our main encampment,
Without an hour's delay,
We marched, our force to gather
For a decisive fray;
Forward to Mantinea,
On fruitless errand bent,
To meet repulse from Athens' horse,
Our cavalry was sent.

XIII.

Unmoved by disappointments,
Where, with his pine-woods crowned,
Looms Maenalus above the plain,
Northward our march we wound:

Till in the pass before us
We saw the foe at bay,
With threatening front and bristling line
Drawn up to bar the way.

XIV.

We grounded arms, and halted,
As tho' declining fight,
And watched their footmen quit the ranks,
Their horsemen down alight;
Then at the word deploying
Our columns into line,
We faced the foe, and stood to arms,
Waiting the battle-sign.

XV.

The left, the post of honour,
We, of the Theban name,
Held, massed in columns fifty deep,
Both horse and foot—unstained to keep
That day our country's fame;
Next our allies lay posted
Less deep, with wider front,
Along the centre and the right,
Our onset to support, nor fight
Till we had borne the brunt.

XVI

We charged—the foe confounded
Marked our advancing host;
Sprang to his steed each horseman,
Each footman to his post;
Nearer the while and nearer
Down on their ranks we bore;
Loud, as our battle swept aslant
Upon them, pealed our paeon-chant;
Sullen their answering challenge rang,

While tramp of feet, and armour's clang,
Swelled the tumultuous roar.

XVII.

Then crashed our Theban phalanx
Full on the Spartan right,
Where all their Dorian chivalry
Were marshalled for the fight;
Before that furious onslaught
The Dorian courage quailed,
For 'gainst that mighty column-rush
Nor sword nor spear availed.

XVIII.

Routed they fled; they might not
Withstand the fierce attack;
The day was ours; for at the sight
Broke Elis and Achaia's might,
False Mantinea took to flight,
And Athens' horse fell back;
But horror chill and sudden
Thrilled all our hearts with fear,
For where, like pine-tree straight and tall,
He fought, the foremost of us all,
We saw our gallant leader fall,
Pierced by a foeman's spear.

XIX.

Too well the Spartans knew him
Our champion and our stay:
Knew him their fiercest, sternest foe
In many a hard-fought fray;
And many a dart had pierced him
Sped with revengeful aim,
And many a lance had sought his breast
As on the flying rout he pressed,
Before his death-wound came.

XX.

Nought recked we of pursuing,
 Tho' now in full retreat
 The foe were scattering far and wide,
 Careless the while what might betide,
 So we might guard the latest breath
 Of him, who stricken to his death,
 Lay senseless at our feet;
 Gently we raised him, gently
 We bore him from the field,
 Still in his breast the spear-head,
 Still at his side his shield.

XXI.

Out of the din of battle
 He raised his filming eyes:
 "My shield?"—" 'Tis safe;" "The victory?"—"Ours;"
 He heard; it nerved his failing powers;
 He faintly strove to rise;
 "'Tis well," he said; "unconquered
 A soldier's death I die;"
 And with a proud smile lift his face
 Up to the golden sky.

XXII.

Then—"Send me Daīphantos:
 Send Iolaīdas;"
 We only turned a mournful glance
 To where, 'mid shivered sword and lance,
 Each lay, a gory mass.
 He looked, and saw his answer
 In each averted face;
 "Both dead," he sighed; "then must ye make
 Peace with the foe for Hellas' sake;"
 Then mused a little space.

XXIII

Silent we stood around him,
 For we knew all help was vain,

And the death-drops gathered on his brow,
White with his deadly pain;
Till, mastered by his anguish,
"Pull out the spear"—he said;
We dragged it out; the crimson blood
Gushed forth, and in that noble flood
His hero-spirit fled

XXIV.

Light lie, Epaminondas,
The earth upon thy breast;
In war and strife has been thy life,
Peaceful shall be thy rest;
In the far distant islands,
Where the blest spirits roam,
The shades of all the glorious dead
Shall bid thee welcome home.

The End



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